NEW BOOKS.

Mrs. Wharton's Latest Story.

Edith Wharton's story of "The House of Mirth" (Charles Scribner's Sons) is of course a well written tale. The author's nice abilities with the pen are not to be questioned. Nobody will overlook here the strong English impress and air. Such an air was doubtless necessary to the end that there should be a verisimilar representation of the group of New York "smart" people here chiefly considered. The word "bounder" fell upon us with might and emphasis. It provided us immediately with a powerful English feeling. We looked for "fad," but it has evaded us if it is in the book. We remark in the way of compensation "trams and waggons"—wagons with two g's, a generous supply which has always impressed us as an assurance of solid and trustworthy construction. These "trams and waggons" have their place and set up their tumult in our Sixth avenue and we have a "chemist's," no doubt with a soda water attachment, in the same familiar thoroughfare.

Glittering people inhabited the House of Mirth. Miss Lily Bart was well calculated to turn the heads of beholders as she greeted Lawrence Selden at the Grand Central Station on a September day. Selden was a lawyer, but his legal aspect is subordinated in the story. Principally he was a man of poise, of imagination and of praiseworthy instincts in an artificial, feverish and not particularly intellectual or moral social atmosphere. Lily went for tea to Selden's bachelor apartment. Nothing could have been more innocent than this tea drinking, but a malicious fate was watching for her, and it pursued her with an iterant and cumulative malice from that hour.

After her tea with Selden, Lily went up in a drawing room car on the Hudson River railroad to Bellomont. We wonder if it is true that Mrs. George Dorset, a sinuous and uneasy beauty with large dark eyes, would really have smoked in the public part of the car if it had not been for the restraining presence of Mr. Percy Gryce, a florid and modest young gentleman, inheritor of the greatest collection of Americana in the world, "whose own lips were never defiled by tobacco." Of course we know from plenty of novels that English ladies have come to smoke without observable restraint. What English ladies do some ladies in this country are quite prepared to do. On reflection we have small doubt that the fascinating Bertha Dorset smoked in the parlor car when she pleased. Lily Bart smoked. She had a gold cigarette case, and she carried away several of Mr. Selden's cigarettes after the tea in his bachelor abode.

Lily was in great trouble at Bellomont. She played bridge there. The first night she lost $300. It was much more than she could afford. A splendid place, Bellomont. Lily, after her loss, "lingered on the broad stairway, looking down into the hall below, where the last card players were grouped about the tray of tall glasses and silver collared decanters which the butler had just placed on a low table near the fire." The loveliness of the scene amounted to witchery. It almost amounted to compensation. "The hall was arcaded, with a gallery supported on columns of pale yellow marble. Tall clumps of flowering plants were grouped against a background of dark foliage in the angles of the walls. On the crimson carpet a deerhound and two or three spaniels dozed luxuriously before the fire, and the light from the great central lantern overhead shed a brightness on the women's hair and struck sparks from their jewels as they moved." If only Lily had had more money left in her purse. Alas! she had a mere $20. The dressmaker was pressing. What she had meant as a sop for the dressmaker had been lost at bridge.

It may from so much be divined how the fate awaiting Lily unfolded itself. She was accustomed to luxury. She needed it. Luxury costs money. She had no money. She had beauty. Beauty need not want for money. But beauty must pay the price. It was Lily's failure to perceive that she was under obligations for money received that brought her troubles upon her. In all the transactions that brought on her troubles she preserved the innocent view. The master of Bellomont gave her $9,000. She thought that he had speculated successfully and easily with her own slender store of money. This idea was absurdly remote from the truth in the case. The master of Bellomont was brutal in claiming his reward. Our heroine pursued a vertiginous but fairly innocent course in all her efforts to reestablish herself. She was misunderstood at every turn. The fate that we have called malicious was forever after her.

We have often wished that we might not be troubled by the logic that results in tragedy. We know how simple and how vain is such a wish. A tale must be remorseless in order to be true. The workmanship of this tale is all that could be desired.

James M. Ludlow's "Sir Raoul."

James M. Ludlow's story of "Sir Raoul" may be classified as a monumental romance with a colossal theme—"The theft of an empire." It is a vigorous story resounding in the clash of arms, the thunder of horses' hoofs, the din of opposing armies, and shows evidences of great care and sincerity in treatment, wide historical research and excellent craftsmanship in the working out of an intricate and elaborate plot.

The writer is never careless and rarely clumsy, but he errs on the side of overelaboration and ormentation and, bewildered by the abundance of adventurous material and historical fact at his command, he lacks the power of selecting and discarding with discrimination. The result is a huge canvas crowded with struggling figures and confused scenes which distract rather than focus attention.

The romantic theme about which these conflicting elements centre is the love of Sir Raoul, a German knight, for the Lady Renée, a Princess of Greece. Sir Raoul, having in jealous rage at the Lady Renée's seeming indifference tilted unfairly in a great tournament, is despoiled of rank and honor as a knight and, fleeing from the tribunal of his accusers, determines to win back his spurs by knightly deeds of extraordinary valor and hazard. To this end all the machinery of the thirteenth century crusade is brought to bear—that abortive crusade which was diverted from conquering the Mosiem to capturing the city of Constantinople. Figures famous in history appear to strengthen credulity and nail down exuberant fancy to a framework of fact—Otto and Pope Innocent, Philip and Boniface and Dandolo of Venice, wily master of them all. Adventure succeeds adventure with breathless rapidity. Daring risk is crowned with marvellous rescue. Not once, but many times the hero redeems his lost honor, until the most voracious seeker after sensation is sated with the record.

When Sir Raoul's knighthood is finally restored, three great nations claim him as their hero and three great personages assist at his investiture, and three titles are conferred upon him—Knight of Venice, Knight of Flanders and Knight of Greece. Meantime the heroine has remained loyal and beautiful and the accolade of her lips is more precious to him than the sword strokes of Doge and Emperor.

The story climaxes successfully in the siege of Constantinople, and it would seem that the lovers might be allowed to settle down and enjoy themselves, the reader to turn out his light, but the author ordains otherwise. The ship on which they embark for Venice is wrecked and more marvellous escapes and heroic rescues must be accomplished before the knight in pilgrim's guise and about to become a monk is allowed to find the Lady Renée and to persuade her that she has not after all any "vocation" for the cloister, which she is just on the point of entering. It is this anticlimax that breaks down the reader's endurance and weakens a piece of literary craftsmanship that is remarkable for ingenuity of imagination and mastery of plot building.

Nothing that bears upon the period is omitted by the lavish author, who explains how the Saxons obtained their name, how the bronze horses were brought to San Marco and why among the sacred relics still revered in churches are sometimes two heads of the same saint at different places, and enough wood of the true cross to build the ships that conveyed it. The book is published by the Fleming H. Revell Company.

Four Real Heroes in This Story.

"The Fortunes of the Landrays" is a panoramic chronicle covering a wide extent of territory and introducing four generations of a migratory and adventurous family. The book is episodic and documentary, embodying a vast amount of local color, written for the most part in the vernacular of the Mississippi Valley and occupied with some of its characteristic phases of civilization and industrial development.

Stephen Landray, the first, surveyor and soldier, came out from Virginia with horses and slaves and settled in the wilderness to become a landed proprietor, according to "tomahawk rights." Stephen Landray second went out across the plains during the gold fever of '48, leaving his scalp with the Indians and his personal papers to make trouble for the villain in the climax. Stephen Landray third fought in the civil war and, following the instincts of his race, went out into one of the "boom towns" of Kansas to die and leave his son, Stephen Landry fourth, to gather up the loose ends of the plot and to inherit the family fortune.

The romantic interest of the story centres in Virginia Landray, the wife of Stephen the second, one of those rare types of strong and loyal womanhood, who as wife and widow, adopted mother and grandmother is distinguished by womanly charm; but the wooing of this austere lady through three generations is a frail thread upon which to hang such a long and heavy narrative.

The scheme of the story, as its outline suggests, includes picturesque pioneer days, the tragedy of the gold seekers, the opening of Utah, the civil war, the boom period in the middle West, the industrial epoch in the Ohio Valley, together with sundry marrying and giving in marriage, whereby the Landray family legitimately perpetuates its race. The incidents of the story are evidently founded on fact, the huge plot structure is well articulated, the characters will defined, but the book is overcrowded and tiresome. It is a patchwork of many tales, none of them original, which might be interesting to the Landrays themselves as a family chronicle, but does not appeal to the "average reader." The story is written by Vaughan Kester and published by McClure, Phillips & Co.

The Doings of a Cowboy Hero.

"Ben Blair" is an absurdly improbable tale of the impressionist school in which crude colors are splashed on audaciously and startling effects are sought through violent contrasts.

The hero is a cowboy with an unverifiable ancestry and "relentless eyes" before which his enemies cower in abject dismay.

The villain is a neurotic product of overculture seeking relief from the pessimism of success in novel sensation. The heroine is a Western girl with an Eastern education which seems to unsettle her mind. The hero after the usual bloodcurdling adventures upon the plains descends upon the Eastern city where the heroine is seeing life under the espionage of the polished villain. He comes in his broad brimmed hat with his ready revolver, "holds up" the villain in his own apartment, clears out a disorderly house, into which he has been enticed, at the point of the pistol and carries off the heroine like the Sabine lovers of old only to find as they did that that is just the sort of thing she likes.

This lurid product of the imagination has been concocted by Will Lillibridge and is published by A. C. McClurg & Co.

Farthest South.

The record of the greatest geographical feat of the twentieth century so far, a voyage that will stand out in the story of polar research for all time, is contained in the two sumptuous volumes of Capt. Robert F. Scott's "The Voyage of the Discovery" (Charles Scribner's Sons). True it is that Capt. Scott did not reach the South Pole, nor even the South magnetic pole, but in striving for the one he attained 82° 16' 33" South, far beyond the point that any man had approached or is likely to for many years, while the journey in quest of the other is even more remarkable. Even more notable than the geographic achievement was the conduct of the expedition, for Capt. Scott was able to bring back not only his ship but every man of his crew save one, who was killed by accident.

It is the misfortune of all explorers, considered only as authors, that the cream of their books, the statement of their discoveries and the main incidents, is skimmed long before they have time to write down their stories. This seemed to be more than usually the case with the Discovery, for the first relief ship brought back the news of the great journey to the south more than a year before Capt. Scott got free of the ice, while the result of the second year's work was cabled as soon as he returned to civilization. Summaries of what had been done were repeated over and over again before the Royal Geographical Society and in other public places by himself and his comrades. It is therefore startling to find in Capt. Scott's narrative so much that has not become public and that is likely to make his story a classic of adventure and exploration.

The reason is that Capt. Scott kept day by day a pretty full diary, and the fact that he was no hardened explorer led him to put down as new touches of human nature and observations that give wonderful life to his story. The tale of the struggle for the South Pole made by himself with Lieut. Shackleton and Dr. Wilson, with their dogs failing them, is an epic of human pluck and endurance, but in that journey they had the western line of mountains at least to relieve the monotony. More heroic by far is his march with two seamen, Evans and Lashly, due west across the high level plateau to reach the magnetic pole, trudging day by day with not a landmark to cheer them on and dragging their heavy sledges behind them. There are hairbreadth escapes to suit the most sensational taste.

Capt. Scott begins his volume with an admirable summary of previous Antarctic exploration. He next describes how the expedition was gotten up and how the Discovery was built. It is a painful commentary on some sides of human nature that, in spite of all care, the scamping of work on some workingmen's part caused a leak that could never be located and that made it necessary to keep the pumps at work from beginning to end of the voyage, and that the bad quality of some of the provisions supplied brought on sickness

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